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STATE FOR EUR/NCE - WSILKWORTH AND CA/OCS/ACS-SSCHMIEDERER
NSC FOR DAMON WILSON

SENSITIVE
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TAGS: KFLU TBIO PREL EAID CASC WHO RO
SUBJECT: MORE AVIAN INFLUENZA CASES DISCOVERED THROUGHOUT
ROMANIA

REF: A) BUCHAREST 869; B) BUCHAREST 847; C) BUCHAREST 843;
D) BUCHAREST 834; E) BUCHAREST 811

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SUMMARY

¶11. (U) Following the detection of H5N1 in three commercial poultry farms in the city of Codlea, Brasov County, the number of outbreaks identified throughout the country has grown rapidly. A total of 114 outbreaks have been confirmed in 15 counties since May 12, including outbreaks within the city limits of Bucharest, in the surrounding suburbs, and in other major cities.

OUTBREAK STATUS

¶12. (U) As of May 31, a total of 114 avian influenza outbreaks in 15 counties have been confirmed since May 12 of this year. The majority of outbreaks (32) have been in Brasov County near the locations of the three infected commercial farms. Outbreaks have also occurred in several major Romanian cities, including Bucharest, Ploiesti, Pitesti, Sibiu, and the city of Brasov. Post maintains a precise map of AI outbreaks in Romania, updated weekly, and can provide on request (email dmosel@usaid.gov).

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

¶13. (U) The Veterinary and Sanitary Authority reports that bird culling operations have been finalized for 112 of the confirmed outbreaks. The total number of birds culled is 854,761, out of which 196,761 birds originated from domestic households and 658,000 from commercial poultry farms. During May 22-29, 2006 the Food Safety authority inspected 249 commercial farms to verify that proper bio-security measures are enforced. Following these inspections the Authority fined 26 farms a total of approximately 23,000 USD. Two commercial farms have been permanently closed and production and distribution have been temporarily suspended in 11 other commercial farms. Owners or managers of the three commercial farms accused of spreading the virus are being held in custody and are under investigation for transmission of animal diseases and tax evasion.

¶14. (SBU) The Inter-Agency Avian Influenza Task Force, now led by Prime Minister Tariceanu, continues to meet to coordinate the national effort. While Agriculture Minister Flutur was removed from head of this body following criticism from President Basescu, sources tell us that he

continues to chair the effort in the Prime Minister's (frequent) absence. Flutur has, however, taken a lower public profile, leaving press conferences and releases to the Prime Minister, the Central Government Office or the Veterinarian Authority.

INTERNATIONAL EFFORT

15. (SBU) The GOR convened a coordination meeting on May 31 with the international donor community, including USAID. At the meeting, the World Bank pledged to continue its collaboration with other donors to develop a jointly endorsed technical framework for their AI loan program. A WHO mission is currently in Romania assessing food safety, disease prevention and communication needs. Findings will be shared with all donors and the GOR. The Ministry of Public Health requested assistance with laboratory equipment for virus detection, laboratory upgrades, prevention assistance, vaccine production, and creation of facilities outside of Bucharest to treat potential human cases. WHO and the World Bank will assess the vaccine production request within the next two weeks and determine its appropriateness for the new World Bank loan facility. [N.B. USAID and CDC believe the vaccine request to be an unnecessary expenditure. The GOR continues to lobby for donor support on this point.]

16. (SBU) In the meeting, the EC stated that the new outbreaks are a great concern for the EU. A meeting will be held in Brussels on June 1, 2006 to discuss the Romanian situation, with a focus on food safety and animal health as well as disposal of animal waste. To date, the EC has only received one request for assistance from Romania on AI. This request was from the Veterinary and Sanitary Authority for reagents, disinfectants and other items related to outbreaks starting in October 2005. This proposal has been received favorably and is in the final processing stages. If approved the funding level would be Euro 500,000. Other

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EC funding is available, but has not been requested. The EC representative also stated that, should Romania accede to the EU in 2007, the GOR must submit their National Plan for Animal Health by June 15, 2006 to be eligible for assistance under the veterinary fund for compensation for diseases in animals.

KEEPING AMERICANS INFORMED

17. (U) On May 31, post's American Citizen Services chief briefed private U.S. citizens at the American International School of Bucharest on the current status of avian influenza, and how to prepare for a possible AI pandemic and other emergencies. He will repeat the briefing June 5, together with USAID at a town hall meeting at the American Cultural Center for interested U.S. citizens.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Romanian authorities continue to discover cases of AI in the poultry population, likely stemming from malfeasance at two commercial poultry farms in Brasov. The GOR has reacted quickly and transparently to the outbreaks, and is seeking to ensure that such transgressions do not recur. However, government resources are limited, and the GOR is working to access more international assistance. While open to funding requests, the EC has been far from proactive in responding financially. Commission officials and parliamentarians in Brussels have made it clear that Romania's ability to handle animal health will play an important role in determining whether it will be a full member of the Union on January 1, 2007.

TAUBMAN